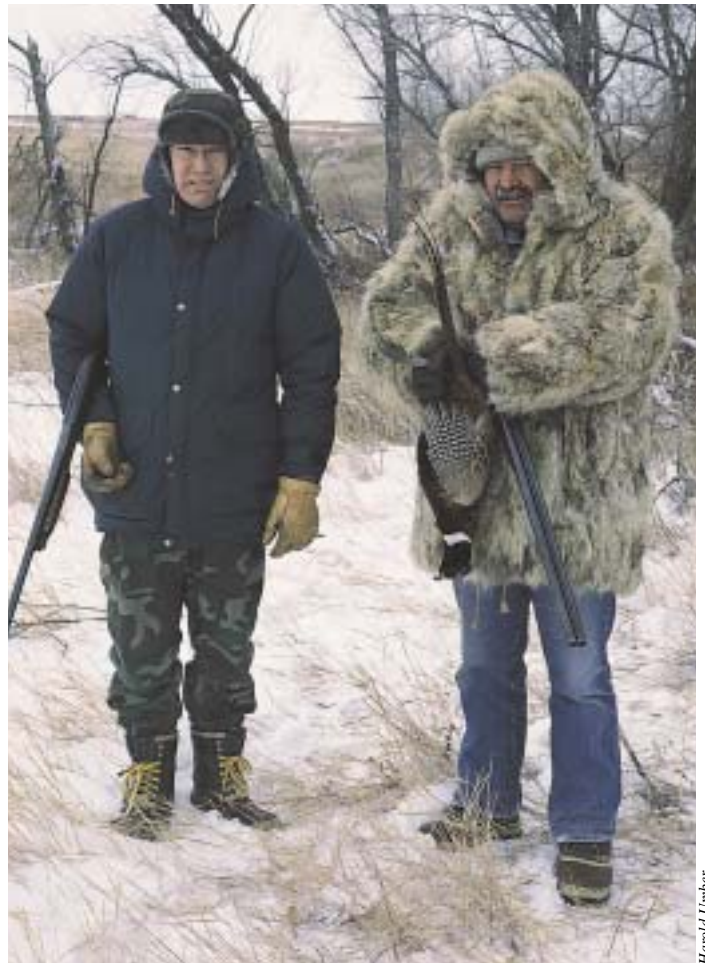


# Late Season Hunts



Harold Umber

*Background photo omitted to save download time.*

*Burt and Craig Calkins in December 1990 on a day when the windchills dipped to minus 80 degrees.*

Harold Umber



*Sami, an English cocker, in December 1992 when Hungarian partridge were still plentiful.*

## By Harold Umber

Hunting trips toward the end of North Dakota's fall seasons are often the most challenging of the year. Outings can range from delightful walks in the countryside to cold miserable ordeals best left to the foolhardy. Late season hunts should be approached enthusiastically, but with care.

I have hunted pheasants in sub-zero-December against a howling wind that plunged the windchill into the minus 70 and 80 degree range; a day when the metal frame on my glasses was so cold that contact with my temples created intolerable pain and I had to walk backward into the wind. All this on a day when I left my hunting dogs at home because I thought it too cold to work them.

Heavy clothes and gloves made hunting possible when going with the wind, but it was impossible to face for very long when walking against it. This late season hunt would have been better postponed until conditions were more hospitable, but commitments and promises coupled with inflexible work schedules made it a case of go or forget it. We went.

Most of the time, the weather for late season pheasant hunting is crisp and invigorating, often tempered by sunshine and fresh snow, elements that can be accommodated by proper clothing. These are great days for hunting with dogs.

Hunting is best with enough snow on the ground to hold wild birds steady to the flush but not too deep to hamper a hunting dog's mobility. Most dogs that I've been around love to hunt in cold weather.

*Background photo omitted to save download time.*



*Randy Kreil on a day in December 1993 when there was lots of snowcover and warm temperatures created a picture postcard day.*

Harold Umber



# Waterfowl

Waterfowl hunting in cold weather occurs from the first spate of bitter weather that freezes prairie marshes in late fall, right on up to season closures around the first of the year. Initially it's a frenzy to find time to take advantage of changing conditions when for a short time a lot of waterfowl are on the move or feeding heavily. Once freeze-up occurs and late arrivals and remaining locals bunch up and settle on the Missouri River or on big open water, many hunters go on to other things and only the hardy or well-prepared continue to hunt.

Hunting techniques range from shooting geese or late-season mallards as they pass from the open water to feeding fields or hunting in the fields themselves, sometimes with decoys and sometimes not. If there is good snow cover, hunters often wear white clothing to better blend into their surroundings. Hunting winter-hardy ducks and geese is often a waiting game that requires patience, fortitude and luck. Sometimes the birds seek food early in the morning, but more often, especially late in the year, many flocks will not leave the water to feed until late morning or early afternoon. These birds will withstand severe cold as long as they can get plentiful feed.



Chris Grondahl



A cornfield off the Missouri River provided lots of action for Andrea Grondahl during the goose season in 1992.

Chris Grondahl



Chris Grondahl

If one can find open water late in the season duck hunting can be spectacular. Inset: Mallard decoy with ice fringe.

Grain fields off the Missouri River downstream from Garrison Dam often provide good hunting for Canada geese until the end of the waterfowl hunting season. Jerry Feist, Bismarck cleans the decoys of freshly-fallen snow, blows his honker call and collects his first goose of the day.



Harold Umber

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*It was a sunny day in late November when Chris Nemire, Menoken, shot this nice bull elk in the Walhalla area of northeast North Dakota.*

## Deer & Other Big Game

Snow for tracking and hunting is welcomed by most big game hunters. White-tailed and mule deer are the most widespread species of big game hunted in North Dakota, but for the lucky few, there are also moose and elk to hunt late in the year. Too much snow can hinder one's ability to get around and will work against hunter success; too little, or no snow can make it more difficult to find and track animals. A few inches of snow is welcomed by most big game hunters in North Dakota and since many of our deer seasons run late into November, chances for snow sometime during the hunt are good.

*Fresh snow was welcomed by Jack LaFave, left, and Fred Ryckman, above left, who took these white-tailed bucks in McKenzie County on the last weekend of the 1998 deer season.*







Harold Umber

Serious predator hunters like Fred Ryckman, above, carrying a coyote and C.R. Grondahl, right, with a fox that responded to his rabbit call, use snowshoes to access coyote and fox country when the snow gets deep.

## Predators

Predator hunters love snow and cold weather. Deep snow limits the competition to all but the most dedicated walking hunters and makes it easier to see fox and coyotes bedded or responding to a call. It closes section lines to vehicle traffic and isolates large areas of land preferred by both predators and predator callers. The right conditions can make this winter activity a challenging and exciting adventure. Not much bothers the walking predator hunter except, perhaps, short days, strong winds, snowmobilers, and calls that freeze-up in sub-zero temperatures.

Hunters willing to risk a little frostbite and discomfort from the cold are often treated to the best of what all hunting seasons have to offer, but sometimes it is just best to stay indoors out of the elements, unless of course, some set of circumstances dictate that foul weather or not, there are no alternatives to enduring -70 or -80 degree windchill....

I fell for that once. There is an alternative. Tomorrow.



Chris Grondahl

C.R. Grondahl selects a likely spot to call a fox.



Chris Grondahl